Carthagena, Ohio

1950–1960: A Poem

—Samuel Hazo

THE

Commonweal

Spring Book Issue

Return of the Gadfly

by Anne Fremantle

Henry de Montherlant: Adventurer

by Martin Turnell

Poets on the New Frontier

by Bette Richart

Ox Mountain Parable

by Thomas Merton

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THE
Commonweal
A Weekly Review of Public Affairs, Literature, and the Arts
THIRTY-SEVENTH YEAR OF PUBLICATION

week by week

WAYS TO RECOVERY

IT IS OVER a quarter of a century since Franklin D. Roosevelt and his New Deal advisers introduced a whole series of measures designed to end the Big Depression. The domestic situation was far more urgent then. Mr. Roosevelt's restoration of confidence and New Deal steps to establish certain safeguards proved eminently more successful than his attempts to "prime the pump." Only the T.V.A. program produced real economic growth. But government guarantees of bank deposits, home mortgages and savings in building and loan associations, various forms of social security, supports of farm commodity prices, regulation of wages and hours and the rest have served as effective shock-absorbers during the consequent periodic declines of the American business cycle. They comprise an important contribution to continuing national prosperity.

It was not public works or other efforts to stimulate the nation's depressed economy in the 1930's that set the wheels of industry humming or materially increased the demand for farm products. It was, rather, preparation for war, aid to the Allies and then war itself. Postwar demand for civilian products and the Marshall Plan contributed heavily toward maintaining our great productive momentum. Even today our comparative state of prosperity is heavily dependent on a vast defense establishment and annual expenditures of forty billions for its maintenance.

Mr. Kennedy's problem in inducing national economic growth and reducing unemployment would appear to be of a different quality—or at least of different dimensions—from Mr. Roosevelt's. Technological advances of the past quarter-century have greatly accelerated. One effect is a dwindling demand for unskilled labor, which means that older men who have lost their jobs and younger men who have never gotten started in gainful employment are experiencing the greatest difficulty in finding jobs. Mechanization and the combining of smaller farming units into large acreages have greatly cut down employment opportunities in rural areas as well.

Besides the wide swath cut by mechanization and automation, which spell big increases in productivity with fewer workers, there are the special situations of a local sort. One type involves the playing out of some natural resource in a region, such as coal or iron. Often the main livelihood of a specific locality disappears when a big local company shuts down its plant and moves to greener fields, where it believes conditions for profitable operation are more auspicious.

INFLUENCES SUCH as these make for the "hard core" of unemployment which is so difficult to deal with successfully. People who have utilized special skills all their lives are often not amenable to learning a new trade. And when a region collapses economically, many families with strong local ties are loath to leave their homes and lifelong friends to seek a fresh start elsewhere.

Shrinking employment opportunities on farms and in private industry go hand in hand with unmet social needs that have grown immeasurably. School and hospital facilities are particularly inadequate the country over. Most of our larger American cities have extensive slums which are deteriorating and spreading; the need for decent low-cost housing is urgent. While over forty per cent of the nation's steel capacity remains unused and great numbers of steel-workers remain unemployed, for example, the social facilities available to citizens of the United States continue to compare very unfavorably with those available in

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other countries which are less productive. One big obstacle lies in the inability or unwillingness of private industry to provide for such needs, for it is difficult for government to add their cost to the billions allotted for defense without greatly increasing taxes which are already considerable.

The national recovery problem is never easy, and it would seem that the one Mr. Kennedy is tackling is particularly complex. It requires a whole series of solutions rather than the ramifications of a single big idea. One effort is to give modest assistance to those groups which are most hard hit: the Negro (in government contracts) as he is "last hired and first fired"; the people in chronically depressed areas, victims of economic forces beyond their control; workers who do not receive a living wage; the aged, who are unable to meet their increasing medical expenses; families housed in city slums.

Recovery involves marked improvement in the lot of fellow-citizens such as these more than it does the not-unrelated figures indicating larger orders for machine tools, increases in over-all corporation capital outlay, heavier building contracts, and more orders for new cars and other "durables." Greatly reduced unemployment would be a far surer sign of national economic growth.

THE WORLD COUNCIL'S NEW MEMBER

ALL CHRISTIANS must be excited by the news that the Russian Orthodox Church has applied for membership in the World Council of Churches. The announcement of the historic step taken by Patriarch Alexis of Moscow was made at the recent Council meeting in Buck Hill Falls, Pa., where it was received with applause by the two hundred church leaders who participated. The Orthodox request for membership will be voted on at the Council's next assembly, scheduled for next November at New Delhi, India, but there is little doubt that it will be approved.

The importance of this development can hardly be exaggerated. The admission of the Russian Orthodox Church to the Council will permit valuable communication and cooperation between Christian leaders of the West and those in the Soviet Union. It will almost certainly have an effect on the isolation and nationalism which has hitherto characterized the Russian Orthodox Church. Not least, it will mean that the "divided Christians" spoken of sorrowfully by Patriarch Alexis will have moved another large step closer to unity.

It is a measure of the extraordinary progress of the Ecumenical Movement in the last few years that the admission of the Russian Orthodox Church to the Council will mean that the only large body of Christians not represented in it will be the Roman Catholic Church. And it was only last year that the Vatican took the historic step of appointing an observer to "sit in" at World Council meetings.

Without forgetting or minimizing the difficulties which stand in the way of Christian unity, it is impossible not to be moved and heartened by the Russian Orthodox decision. All Christians will add their prayers to the hope of the Patriarch for "the deepening of mutual understanding among divided Christians and the strengthening of universal brotherhood, love and peace among the nations on the basis of the Gospel."

"COUNTRY BEAUTIFUL"

THE BACKING by a group of prominent Midwestern businessmen of a new illustrated monthly devoted to the virtues of the countryside has attracted considerable attention. Regular publication is to begin in the fall but an advance issue, with its good halftones and fine full-page color illustrations, indicates the quality its readers may expect. The emphasis in this first issue is more on the virtues of untrammeled nature itself than on the experience of farming or the joys of country living. One article is critical of the conformities in a suburban real estate development, another highlights the opportunities of small-town America and the challenges it now faces. And William Saroyan contributes a warmly appreciative memoir about a California vineyard.

Publisher and Editorial Director of "Country Beautiful" (12821 W. Blue Mound Road, Brookfield, Wis.) is Father Michael P. Dineen, former executive secretary of the National Catholic Rural Life Conference. A subscription costs five dollars.

INFORMATION AND SECRECY

PRESIDENT Kennedy's address to the American Newspaper Publishers Association was both symptom and diagnosis of some of our current political ills. The diagnosis was familiar. Our nation is now, he stated, faced with a threat that is unprecedented in its nature, its scope and its seriousness. A free and open society, we are challenged by a closed, totalitarian society which is

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efficient, disciplined and determined to extend itself.

These are words and attitudes that Americans have grown accustomed to acknowledging over the years. Coming from a man who has said more than once that Communism is not our major national problem, they did weigh heavier in the scales. They were, furthermore, delivered with a depth of analysis and sense of style to which the nation has not yet become wholly accustomed.

But the address was not only a diagnosis of the situation we have agreed to call the cold war, it was also symptom. For the address suggested to a major institution of our society, the press, ways of assessing its role in the major conflict.

President Kennedy emphasized that "the deadly challenge imposes upon our society two requirements . . . which must be reconciled and fulfilled if we are to meet this national peril. I refer, first, to the need for far greater public information; and second, to the need for far greater official secrecy."

There are some few people, of course, who would oppose greater public information, but they are unlikely to be found in the ranks of publishers and editors. But there are also few publishers and editors who would favor greater official secrecy, or at least take the responsibility of such secrecy upon themselves. The President remarked that a totalitarian system has no such problem, that it can conduct the cold war "with a wartime discipline no democracy would ever hope or wish to match."

Then the dilemma was posed: do the necessary restraints of national security "need to be more strictly observed if we are to oppose this kind of attack as well as outright invasion?" And, as an important factor in this area, does the press of this country have special obligations that are as unprecedented as our present situation.

It would be a simple matter to throw this question into the hopper of old disputes, grind it up and come out with the predictable responses. One would be asked to choose, for example, between information and secrecy, between devotion to freedom and concern for society, between the rights of the press and the obligations of the government. There was an immediate tendency on the part of some publishers to react in this fashion, for example, and much further comment will undoubtedly be phrased in those terms.

There are, of course, some reasons that the press should be cautious at this point. The timing of the President's address, coming as it did after the Cuban fiasco, was particularly unfortunate. For if the press erred at all in that affair it was on the side of undue caution, not printing even information that was readily accessible to Castro's forces.

But the accidental circumstances surrounding the address should not distract one from the main point. The press in this country will continue to meet the risks and challenges posed by a free society much as it has in the past. But the world itself is changing rapidly. It is not what it was when Mr. Truman or even Mr. Eisenhower first took office. Nor is it simply polarized into two great forces as their foreign policies suggested. Unfortunately Mr. Kennedy's address suggests a reversion to rather than an advance upon that policy.

NOTICE TO OUR READERS

THE COMMONWEAL has moved its offices. The new address is 232 Madison Avenue, New York 16, N.Y. The new telephone number is MUrray Hill 3-2042.

VERITAS BY ANY OTHER NAME?

HARVARD'S "Latin riot" was an unusual affair, as riots go. A number of the demonstrators shouted their slogans in classical Latin; one of them wore a Roman toga and delivered a full-fledged oration, also in Latin; not least, the object of the mob's displeasure attempted to soothe them by brandishing a volume of Horace and reciting doggerel verse. Unfortunately, the proceedings were marred by some less elevated behavior, like egg-throwing and, on the part of the harried police, the use of tear-gas.

The occasion for this uproar was also gratifyingly Cantabridgian. It seems the Committee on Seals, Arms and Diplomas had announced that Harvard degrees henceforth will be written in English, not the traditional Latin. In response to this assault on a three centuries-old custom—and perhaps influenced a little by the advent of spring—Harvard's young scholars raised a protest, one thing led to another, and there was the "Latin riot."

We are somewhat surprised by the passion of the Harvard boys for the trappings of the past, what with their dedication to youth and new frontiers and all. And we are disappointed by the unseemliness with eggs and tear-gas bombs. But, all things considered, this was indubitably a riot with tone. Say what you will about Harvard, there are not many schools in the country which could run an affair even half as classy.

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THE EICHMANN CASE

IN HIS PRE-TRIAL deposition to the Israeli police, Adolph Eichmann tried to justify his actions by explaining that he would have killed his own father if he had been ordered to by his superiors. The terrible thing is, I am inclined to believe him.

I don't know how others are reacting to the proceedings at the Eichmann trial. For me the prosecutor's initial description of the Nazi horrors brought back the memories of those days as vividly as if they were yesterday. And if the accounts of the Eichmann trial have this effect on me, I can imagine what a terrible experience it must be for Jews, many of whom lost mothers, fathers, brothers, sisters, sometimes entire families in the death camps.

In discussing the Eichmann trial, then, this is something Christians should not lose sight of. The manner of Eichmann's capture and the trial itself raise many troubling questions of international law. I am not suggesting that these should be ignored, and Jews would certainly be wrong if they equated concern on this score with anti-Semitism or hostility to the state of Israel. But when these questions of legality are considered, it seems to me we must be careful not to forget the central fact behind the Eichmann trial.

This central fact is that, nineteen hundred years after the birth of Christ, a monstrous form of pagan barbarity arose in the heart of Christian Europe. Men born and raised in a Christian nation were caught up in a terrible madness, and from the worship of the one true God they turned to the worship of blood and race—a terrible perversion that led them to their "final solution to the Jewish problem" and ultimately to the "logic" of the gas chamber.

What has already been unfolded at the Eichmann trial does not make pleasant reading, and I would guess that worse is still to come. There is no way I know of to make pretty reading out of the Nazi slaughter houses. And yet, unpalatable as they are, the gas chambers disguised to look like shower rooms, the mass graves the victims were forced to dig before they were killed, the diseased and wasted bodies our troops found when they liberated the camps—these were facts, and they cannot be glossed over. Whatever else is said about the Eichmann trial, it is surely right that we who are Christians remember the six million men, women and children who were coldly and systematically put to death because they were Jews.

For Christians the Eichmann trial seems to me to pose once again two related questions. Could the Nazi horror have sprung full-blown out of nowhere, without centuries of anti-Semitism to nourish and give it strength in secret? And when the dark shadow of Nazism appeared over Germany, was the Christian response to this evil even remotely adequate? To my mind, the painful answer to both questions has to be no.

The sacred liturgy of the Church is sprinkled with references to our roots in Israel. Abraham is our patriarch, and our priests are priests forever according to the order of Melchisedech. In the nuptial Mass, Christian wives are admonished to follow the example of the Jewish holy women, to be dear like Rachel, wise like Rebecca, faithful like Sarah. A few weeks ago when the great Preface of the Easter Vigil was sung, our churches echoed with the references to "our forefathers, the children of Israel." But does our secular history and private conduct reflect this fact? By and large, with noble and notable exceptions, I think not.

Perhaps at this late date it is impossible to estimate with any real accuracy the nature and the depth of the Christian response to Hitler's madness. Perhaps it is better that we simply pay honor to those who spoke up against the rise of barbarism, while we withhold judgment on those who were silent—if only because few of us are able to say with any degree of certainty what we ourselves would do in the face of a similar test. But I think we do have to admit the obvious: for every Christian voice that was raised against Hitler, there were hundreds which were not—and this not only in Germany. Here I think, for instance, of the reaction encountered in the pre-war U.S. by a brave priest-friend who had to flee Hitler's wrath. In those days, he told me, many Americans, including many Catholics, were convinced that there must be "something wrong" about a German priest who had to leave his own country.

There are, I suppose, people who will think I underestimate Christian opposition to Hitler; they will say I do not attach enough weight to the papal condemnations of Nazism, or to the utterances of this Bishop or that. But, despite such disagreements, on one thing at least there is now rather general agreement: we know what the Christian response to Hitler should have been, and this must be counted as progress.

I don't think the question of what the relationship between Christian and Jew should be is really very complicated. In matters like this Pope John seems to have a quick, sure instinct; for me he summed the whole thing up recently when he received a delegation of Jewish visitors. Using his baptismal name and going to the Old Testament for his greeting, the Pope threw open his arms to welcome the Jews and said to them: "I am Joseph, your brother." So are we all, so are we all.

JAMES O'GARA.

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Return of the Gadfly

By Soviet literary critics its author is ranked as one of the four greatest fiction writers in English

by ANNE FREMANTLE

THE TREMENDOUS success of *Doctor Zhivago* in the Free World has been equalled only by the success behind the iron curtain of a novel by a New Yorker, a kind of Boris Pasternak doubling as Grandma Moses. Rarely has an author found herself an international celebrity sixty years after the first appearance of her best selling work. But that is just what happened to Ethel Lilian Voynich, generally called ELV.

Her first novel, *The Gadfly,* was published in London in September 1897. It was an instant best-seller in England and also in these United States where it appeared at the same time. George Bernard Shaw admired it so much that he himself dramatized it; a pirated version appeared on Broadway; and only last year both Bertrand Russell and Rebecca West told of how greatly they admired the book. Now it appears as a paper-back, and ELV, who died in 1960, at ninety-six, would have been enchanted with her new dress.

Yet *The Gadfly's* success in English is nothing compared with its triumph in Russian. It went into more than ten editions in Russia before the 1917 Revolution, and has gone into eighty-four since then. More than 2,500,000 copies have been sold in the eighteen languages of the Soviet Union. Since its translation into Chinese in 1954, over one million copies have been sold in China. Translations into Polish have sold well there (200,000 since 1954) and *The Gadfly* is also doing well in Hungary, Bulgaria, Czechoslovakia, Yugoslavia, East Germany and Outer Mongolia—in 1959 ELV received a long letter from the Literary Club of Ulan Bator, addressing her as "Dear Voynich" and ending "Yours fan."

By Soviet literary critics ELV is ranked with Charles Dickens, Mark Twain and Theodore Dreiser, as one of the four all-time greatest fiction writers in the English language. And for Soviet youth *The Gadfly* is *The Three Musketeers* and *The Last of the Mohicans* rolled into one book. Since the Revolution, *The Gadfly* has been required reading for all high school children throughout the U.S.S.R.; it was made into a play in 1920, and has never been "off the boards" since. Two Russian movies have been made of the novel, the first in 1928, the second, in really splendid technicolor with music by Dmitri Shostakovich, in 1955; it was shown here on Broadway during the summer of 1956. Three operas have also been made out of *The Gadfly,* the latest of which had its *première* at Perm on 8 November 1957 in celebration of the fortieth anniversary of the Russian Revolution. Dramatic readings of *The Gadfly* have been too numerous to count: one Soviet author alone, N. N. Dobrokhotov, wrote to ELV to tell her that in September 1958 he gave his hundredth dramatic reading of her book.

And for all this, Ethel Lilian Voynich had not received a single *kopek* nor even a complimentary copy of her book, until 1955 when seven Soviet writers and editors visited New York, and brought flowers to the small sunny apartment where ELV lived. Later a token payment was made her, and she received a steady stream of letters and queries from the U.S.S.R. Also as a result of the seven editors' visit, *Pravda* ran a three-column story under the headline *"Voynich is Living in New York,"* and in a touching letter after his return, Boris Polevoy, the senior ranking editor of the visiting group, related how his father and mother, themselves devotees of ELV since their childhood, had given him a copy of *The Gadfly* for his ninth Christmas.

IT IS NATURAL to ask what kind of a story has aroused such great interest. On the title page is written the cry of the expelled demons in the Gospel: *"What have we to do with Thee, Thou Jesus of Nazareth?"* The novel itself is set in Italy in the 1830's and 1840's, at the time of the Risorgimento. It tells of Arthur, the illegitimate son of Canon Montanelli, an

Mrs. Fremantle, formerly a contributing editor of The Commonweal, is a well-known writer, lecturer and critic.

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Italian cleric, and an English woman, Mrs. Burton, who is married to a rich, elderly English shipowner living in Leghorn. Before Arthur's mother dies he is for several years under the spiritual care of his real father, head of the seminary at Pisa. Arthur is gentle and devout, and even has thoughts of becoming a priest, that is until he meets again Gemma, daughter of the English Dr. Warren, his childhood playmate in Leghorn. Now grown into an adolescent girl, dressed all in black, with heavy black braids she is, at seventeen, the Egeria of a group of conspirators, members of the secret *Young Italy* society. To Arthur she seems a "melancholy vision of Liberty mourning for the lost Republic." He falls passionately in love, and *The Gadfly* becomes a trifoliate story, telling of the father-son relationship between the priest Montanelli and Arthur; of the defiance by Arthur of Church and State; and of the love-story of Arthur and Gemma.

Soon after Arthur's meeting with Gemma, Montanelli, thought too liberal by the authorities, is "kicked upstairs" and becomes Bishop of Brisighella. Arthur confesses to Montanelli's successor, Father Cardi, his association with the *Young Italy* society, and Father Cardi informs the authorities. Arthur and his friends are imprisoned, and, worse, when Arthur alone is let out, he is accused by Gemma of being an informer, a traitor. At the same time Arthur hears for the first time that Montanelli is his real father. Suffering horribly from mental shock, Arthur stages a fake suicide and ships himself off to South America. "He will be a wanderer henceforth, caring for nothing, with unforgiving hatred burning in his heart," as one reviewer put it.

Years later, Arthur, totally unrecognizable, reaches Italy once more. He has been brutally maimed by a Lascar; he suffers from agonizing attacks of pain; he has been forced to work under Negroes in sugar plantations; he has been hired as a humpback, a figure of gross and tortured ridicule, by a traveling circus; he now stutters terribly. But he holds to his youthful vow to live and die to free Italy, and he has returned to join revolutionists and anarchists, rebels and assassins. Arthur of course meets Gemma again, still a member of the conspirators' circle, still lovely and loving: she suspects a little that the boy she thought she had sent to his death by her contempt is this savage *Gadfly* (that is the name Arthur has won for himself by his articles in the English, French and Italian press).

The latter part of the novel is at one level a psychological drama involving an Oedipus situation. In a terrible interview, the Gadfly again meets his father, now become a Cardinal, and is at first unrecognized. The Gadfly insists his father must choose between his faith and him. The Cardinal gives the Gadfly up to save further bloodshed; he sacrifices his only begotten son rather than allow the revolution, with all that it involves, to continue and to spread. After Arthur has been slowly tortured and shot, however, his devoted father goes out of his mind with grief, torn beyond the tension of his earthly love for his child and his duty to his people, his spiritual children. After carrying the Host in solemn procession, the Cardinal raises It and smashes It to the floor, in a crazed identification of himself with God the Father, sacrificing His Son to save mankind from further ruin. This tragic and tremendous theme as much as its anti-clerical and nihilist elements may account for the novel's popularity in the U.S.S.R.

It is difficult to convey the melodramatic quality of this Oedipus-in-Italy tale. Reviewing *The Gadfly* when it first appeared, in the (London) *Daily Telegraph* on 15 September 1897, Mr. W. L. Courtney, never suspecting the author to be a woman, wrote "Mr. Voynich wins us in our own despite" and he adds "we seem . . . to catch here and there a personal note, as though the author himself had taken sides with his hero against the world. . . . The Gadfly is arrested, tortured and finally shot in a scene full of horrible detail." The U.S. papers also vied with one another in decrying the "outrageous and horrible character of the novel." Yet it is, as many reviewers emphasized, a profoundly religious book.

ELV WAS to the end astonishingly lovely, with noble regular features, a "schoolgirl complexion" and an aureole of white hair. Looking at a photo of her taken in Russia in 1888, I asked her, "You look as though you had been very fair: what color was your hair then? About the same as mine?" (I am a pale carrot.) ELV sniffed, with superb disdain. "Much brighter" she said, and added, commenting on herself and her four sisters, "Only Alice was pretty, but I always had good hair."

ELV'S own life-story was as dramatic and exciting as her novel. Her father, George Boole, was a self-taught mathematician, who never went to college himself, but became a professor at Queens College, Cork. He wrote *The Laws of Thought* which was published in London in 1854. Herbert Spencer wrote that with this book, George Boole had made "the greatest advance in logic since Aristotle" and Bertrand Russell has said that "Boole discovered pure mathematics." It is today one of the "Hundred Great Books" that constitute the program of that name at St. John's College, Annapolis, and Boole's *Theory of Analytical Transformations* laid the foundations of logical positivism. ELV's mother was Mary Everest, and her mother's brother was the man who discovered, and after whom was named, the world's highest mountain. Mary Everest Boole wrote many pseudo-philosophical books, of which *Logic Taught by Love, Mistletoe and Olive* and *The Forging of Passion into Power* had a certain vogue.

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Poor Mary Everest! She was half her husband's age, and he died leaving her with five little girls to raise, the youngest, Ethel Lilian, only seven months old. Memorial windows were put up to Boole in Lincoln Cathedral, but his five little girls got no formal schooling, and all ELV remembers of her childhood is that "we were so terribly poor." Their mother got a job as a school matron, and the children only saw her for an hour a day, "yet our house was always full of intellectuals talking."

Mary Boole sat at the feet of such famous Victorian revivalist divines as Frederick Maurice (who also influenced George Eliot and Tennyson) and James Hinton. "They would talk about the Great Pulsator instead of God," ELV reminisced, "and James Hinton's circle of admiring ladies would also talk endlessly about many unmentionable subjects! Before I even knew how babies came I had my nose rubbed in the facts of prostitution—we were all brought up on James Hinton's crazy theories."

ELV got erysipelas when she was eight, and was sent by her mother to live with her father's brother, Charles Boole, who was manager of a Lancashire coal mine. This man was a sadist, and, though he never hit ELV, he would flog his own children. He would make her play the piano for hours, and sometimes would hit the piano, making ghastly faces. "I've forgiven him now," ELV said "because I know he was a musician who could not express himself. But he once accused me of stealing a lump of sugar. When I wouldn't confess, he shut me up for days in a room all alone, threatening to put a chemical in my mouth to test my truthfulness. I told him I would drown myself in the horsepond, and he knew I meant it. He wrote to my mother and said he couldn't manage his own children while I was in the house. So when I was ten I was allowed to come home. And then I had a nervous breakdown."

It was music that proved to be the salvation of the gifted, hyper-sensitive girl, although there was little money for lessons until, at eighteen, a small legacy enabled her to study for three years in Germany, at the Berlin Hochschule der Musik. "What," I asked ELV the first time we met, "made you hate the Almighty so much?" "One day in Berlin," she replied, "Professor Spitta, a great expert on Bach, was lecturing to us, and he explained to us that in tuning, the third and fourth notes of the octave had to be a little off, or the octave wouldn't fit. From that instant I hated God, and despised this Almighty Creator of all things visible and invisible, who couldn't make even eight notes fit. I hope the poor lecturer never knew what he did to me!" "You should have waited," I said. "Einstein has shown that it's only *here* that the octave doesn't fit—only in our space-time continuum." "Yes," the ninety-six-year old author replied reflectively, "perhaps I *was* a bit hasty."

"WHERE did you find your *Gadfly* and when?" I asked her. "In a way," ELV replied, "I found him—or he me—before I was born. Two Italians implicated in a rising against the Austrians in 1848 were imprisoned in a terrible fortress, the Spielberg. One, Carlo Poerio, had been condemned to twenty-four years in irons. He had started life as a schoolmaster and later was Minister of Education in the briefly Liberal Government of Naples in 1830.

"Late in 1859 Carlo and the other man were among those being transferred to Naples by ship. A son of one of the prisoners managed to smuggle himself on board, and bribed the sailors to capture the captain, whom they forced to sail for England. The ship was driven by bad weather to take refuge on the coast of Cork, and the two men there met my parents. My three-and-a-half-year-old sister Mary made a great hit with them, and was much intrigued by their story, insisting they had been imprisoned in our attic and that *she* had set them free. They went on to London to join Cavour. Later, when Italy was free, my father and the two men were all dead.

"When I was fifteen, spending a summer holiday in Ireland, I found a book about Mazzini—probably Venturi's *Memoir*. Mazzini's dark hair curling down to his shoulders, his melancholy beauty and distinction, remained with me. Mazzini had written about his own youth. I determined as soon as I was allowed to choose my own clothes to copy Mazzini," ELV declared. "I dressed in black until my marriage, mourning for the state of the world." "And Montanelli," I asked, "where did you find him?" "Was he suggested to you by Antonelli?" I asked, thinking of the reactionary adviser of Pope Pius IX. "No," ELV shuddered. "How could he be? Antonelli was a horror—an absolute horror. No, Montanelli was modelled on the Abbé Lammenais—I had read his *Paroles d'un Croyant* as a girl, and was much moved by them."

ELV soon met two very distinguished Liberal exiles; either of whom she could choose to teach her Russian. Prince Peter Kropotkin had been imprisoned in Russia in 1876, but had escaped with his wife first to France and then to England, and Sergei Kravchinski (whose pseudonym was Stepniak) had fled his native land after assassinating the brutal Mezentzev, the chief of the secret Czarist police. ELV chose Stepniak, but grew fond too, of Kropotkin, and told me she thought he and Enrico Malatesta, the Italian anarchist, were "the only two real saints I ever knew. Kropotkin," she went on, "was nearly good enough to be an anarchist. One would have to be an angel to be *really* good enough—but he came as near as any human being I ever met."

DURING Easter week, in 1887, ELV set off for Russia to see if conditions were as bad as the refugees proclaimed. She arrived in Warsaw, where she

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stood in the big square, staring in horror at the Warsaw Citadel, the grim stale prison, a slight, blonde figure, bareheaded, in black. In St. Petersburg she sought out and stayed with Karaulova, a sister of Stepniak's wife. Vasili Karauloff, Karaulova's husband, had been sentenced to four years solitary confinement: ELV never met him. Karaulova told ELV how, after her husband had been taken off in the middle of the night by the Czar's secret police, she had gone seeking him from jail to jail, each time being told he was elsewhere. Finally, she was told he was in Kiev; arrived there, she was told no, he was in Moscow. Arrived, penniless by now, in Moscow she was asked "Why ever did you leave Petersburg? Your husband never has."

When the summer came, ELV, Karaulova and the boy set off for the country, travelling to the Karauloff family home in the province of Pskoff near Novgorod. After three days in a springless cart they arrived in a wild and lonely lake district. It was "cursed alike by nature and by man, frozen half the year, malarious the other half, rich in game and water-lilies." Yet ELV loved this nature, "the untrodden tangle of alder-swamp, golden with iris, blue with forget-me-nots . . . the circling of great hawks by day and the howl of many wolves by night." An avenue of great lime trees led from the lake to the dilapidated manor house, roughly built of split tree-trunks and dried moss.

The people around were riddled with T.B. and V.D , poisoned and rotted, as ill used by officials and money-lenders after emancipation as by landowners and overseers before. Karaulova was a doctor, and ELV rode or drove around helping her "perpetrate crime" as she described it . . . "the crime of keeping people alive who would have been better off dead, and of bringing babies into the world who should never have been allowed to be born." That whole summer long ELV boiled instruments and passed bandages, gave injections and took temperatures.

In August 1887 ELV travelled alone some fifty miles, again by springless cart, from Kostroma on the Volga to a manor house where she had been invited to see the total eclipse of the sun. An old kerchiefed widow who kept the posting station where they stopped to change horses, her wrinkled face puzzled, said to her, "You are not from these parts. Are you from Moscow? No? Poland? No? Germany? No?" "England," ELV explained. "Take off your gloves," ordered the old woman, crossing herself before the icon on the wall. "Now open your mouth." She then shook her head. "Don't you know it's a sin to make fun of an old woman," she said. "A pretty girl like you should be ashamed . . . *you're* not English." "Of course I am—what do you mean?" said ELV indignantly. "The English all have claws on their hands, and fire comes out of their mouths," said the crone. Anti-British propaganda during the Crimean War had spread such rumors, which were still widely believed.

ELV stayed two full years in Russia, and left only after Karauloff, his four years' solitary confinement over, had set off for exile in Siberia. ELV saw the prisoners' train steam out, bearing the still unseen Karauloff, and herself put her friend Karaulova and her small boy on the second train that followed. When they were gone, ELV went home—to London.

ELV had learnt the Russian language so thoroughly that when the seven Soviet editors presented themselves sixty-six years later she could reply to them that she had read the recent article about herself in *Ogonek* and had translated it. "I was so glad—I was afraid my Russian would be too rusty," she told me. "My husband and I talked Polish together, and English, but I hadn't spoken any Russian for over six years."

Her husband's life was as dramatic as her own. Stepniak's house in London was the Mecca of all Russian refugees and escapees and there, one night late in 1890, a stranger asked ELV if she had been in Warsaw in Easter Week, 1887. She admitted she had, and to standing in silent anger staring at the outside of the Warsaw Citadel. "I was inside," said the stranger, "and I looked out and saw—you." The stranger's name was Wilfred Michael Babdank Voynich, born in Kaunas (Kovno) of Polish parents on 31 October, 1865. He had studied pharmacy at Moscow University and had joined a student revolutionary group. Soon he was involved in planning the escape of two revolutionists imprisoned in the Warsaw Citadel and condemned to death. Voynich, provided with a Russian passport and introductions, and with money to squander, frequented the nightly card-parties in the officer's quarters of the Citadel and quickly won the favor of Lieut.-Col. Bielanowski of the gendarmerie.

At that time, the gendarme officers lived in Warsaw in complete isolation. Polish society pointedly ignored their existence, and no decent woman of any rank would speak to them; even their Russian colleagues of the regular army were barely polite. Bielanowski, a renegade Pole of bad reputation, found himself a social pariah. He welcomed young Voynich, who lost money gracefully and sniggered over his grim anecdotes of how to obtain information from unwilling witnesses. In time, in order to save the trouble of escorting him to the gates in the small hours, Voynich was given the passwords. The preparations for the escape of the two prisoners were almost complete when a vague hint from a traitor led to the discovery of the tunnel. Four men were hanged. On the day of their execution, Voynich, who meanwhile had been arrested and imprisoned in the same Citadel, was moved, by Bielanowski's orders, to a cell facing the gallows.

He was kept in prison for two years, during which

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he heard, by the usual prisoners' methods of communication, many ghastly "interrogations" of prisoners by Bielanowski, such as those he had heard described at cards. In May 1887, Voynich was exiled to Siberia. His mother, who had come to see him, was told he had been shot; she fainted and he was brought in to see her lying on the ground insensible; Bielanowski then suavely told Voynich he had now kept his promise that Voynich should see his mother before he left. In Eastern Siberia, Voynich met Karaulova and her husband, they arranged his escape and told him to go to Stepniak's house in London, and there to greet "Lily Boole" as ELV was called by her Russian friends. The first person he met on his first evening in London was the golden-haired English girl he had seen from the Warsaw Citadel three years earlier—and she was Lily Boole. They were married the next year.

They had a hard time keeping the wolf from the door, until, one day in the 1890's Wilfred Voynich bought a parcel of old books for a song, and found he could sell them, individually, well; this started him on a most successful rare book business. In 1916 Wilfred Voynich moved to New York; ELV followed him and they lived here until their deaths.

"For us," Peter Borisov, one of her U.S.S.R. admirers said, "she is second to God." She certainly wrote one of the most influential books of this century, and lived to wonder whether that influence had been for the good. "I do not consider my book *virginibus puerisque,*" she wrote around 1900, when she heard it was being lapped up by Russia's youth. But by reading *The Gadfly* we may come to a much clearer idea of Soviet youth's tastes and interests—and find that they are not entirely unlike our own.

RUTHLESS AND UNCOMFORTABLE

Adventurer Montherlant

by MARTIN TURNELL

IN HIS introduction to a new translation of Henry de Montherlant's *Selected Essays,* Peter Quennell writes: "No French playwright or novelist now alive has made a more substantial contribution to European literature." While we may feel that this is a somewhat sweeping statement, there is no doubt that Montherlant is one of the most vigorous and talented of the French writers who have made a reputation since the First World War. What also seems beyond doubt is that no other contemporary French writer of equal stature has made so little impact in English-speaking countries.

Montherlant's main works have been translated, but the uniform edition now in course of publication is the first attempt to present him systematically and in bulk in English. His plays go straight into the repertory of the Comédie Française, but he has not enjoyed anything like the same favor with foreign audiences as the much less impressive Anouilh. The production earlier this year at Oxford of *La Reine morte* ("Queen after Death") appears to have been the first occasion on which any of his plays was seen on the professional stage in England. Oxford opinion was sharply divided on its merits. Unhappily, the "No's" had it: the play did not reach the West End of London.

Mr. Turnell, a regular contributor, is the author of *The Art of French Fiction* and other works.

Even in his own country Montherlant is a controversial figure. His prose style is generally admired, but he is a ruthless, aggressive, uncomfortable author who is hardly likely to endear himself to readers of any nationality. We may suspect that his undeniable prestige in France is due at least in part to his colorful, exciting life, to his being an avowed "adventurer." "Not," he adds caustically, "a literary adventurer who gets himself photographed in a pullover or sitting on a camel, but a real adventurer who hides the fact that he is one . . . I have been an athlete, a soldier and a bullfighter."

He was born in Paris on April 21st, 1896 and believes it to be very significant that this event should have occurred under the sign of Taurus. He claims to be descended from an old and noble line with Spanish antecedents, but one of his critics has cast doubts on his claims and Gide accused him of being "a trifle indiscreet" in his insistence on his aristocratic birth. He was educated at the Catholic Collège de Sainte-Croix at Neuilly where he gave early evidence of his tastes and interests. He wrote a life "in three notebooks" of Scipio the African, and at the age of fifteen first tried his hand at bullfighting.

He served in the First World War as a volunteer and though assigned to one of the auxiliary services, contrived to get himself sent to the front where he was badly wounded and three times mentioned in dis-

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patches. He thoroughly enjoyed the excitement of war with its constant danger of sudden death and *Le Songe* ("The Dream"), the novel based on his wartime experiences, ends with a sentiment which is commoner among hardbitten regulars than among amateur soldiers: "It was the best time of our lives."

After the war he took up sport—football and sprinting—with immense zest, maintaining that it "continued the realism of war" in civilian life and was an antidote to the decadence and decay which he saw everywhere in post-war France. At twenty-six he was captain of a football team: at thirty-one he was back in the arena where he was gored by a bull which seriously injured one of his lungs. In 1925 he had disposed of his home in France, stored his furniture and armed with only a couple of suitcases had embarked on a period of wandering, which in the course of seven years took him to Italy, Spain and North Africa. His different interests are reflected in the books that he published in the middle and late twenties: sport in the two volumes of *Les Olympiques;* bullfighting in *Les Bestiaires,* and travel in *Les Voyageurs traqués.*

HE WAS back in France in 1932 and settled down in earnest to a career as a writer. *Les Célibataires* ("The Bachelors"), which has been generally admired, appeared in 1934. The four volumes of *Les Jeunes filles* ("The Girls"), his best known work of fiction, were published between 1936 and 1939.

He had tried playwriting with a work called *Exile* in 1929, but it was not until the war years that he came to the fore as a dramatist. *La Reine morte,* his finest play, was produced in 1942. It was followed by a series of plays of alternating Catholic and secular inspiration: *Malatesta* in 1946, *Le Maître de Santiago* ("The Master of Santiago") in 1947, *Celles qu'on prend dans les bras* ("Those whom we take in our arms") in 1950, *La Ville dont le prince est un enfant* ("The City whose Prince is a Child") in 1951, *Port-Royal* in 1954, *Don Juan* in 1958, and *Le Cardinal d'Espagne* ('The Cardinal of Spain') in 1960.

Montherlant is not merely an adventurer; he is a man of contradictions: Catholic and pagan; a soldier who now detests modern warfare; a patriot who enjoys belaboring the fatherland; and—most important of all for an understanding of his work—a womaniser who at bottom hates women.

We may feel a certain doubt about his claim that he is an adventurer "who hides the fact that he is one." For Montherlant was the pupil of Barrès and Gide. There is a marked strain of exhibitionism in the man and the writer. The three themes which occur most frequently in his essays and *Notebooks* are religion, art and sex, but it is clear that for him the greatest of these is sex. He is unquenchable on the subject of women because they obviously provide the exhibitionist and the sadist with his best opportunities. "I am not in love with X. . . ." he observes in a characteristic pronouncement, "I am in love with the way I captured her." "The foundation of life," we are told in another passage of the *Notebooks,* "is tranquil sexual satisfaction."

He glories in being not simply an uncommitted writer, but an uncommitted man. The one thing to avoid at all costs is being trapped: falling in love, a wife, a family. His aim is what he calls "affectionate copulation." All through the *Notebooks* we are continually meeting Don Juan on the threshhold of middle age prowling the streets at dawn in search of a young girl: "A battered felt hat, unbrushed shoes, a creased overcoat, yet I am coming back with my live prey. To think that I managed to bring the whole thing off with my shoes unpolished!" It is a limitation in the man and the writer that he should feel flattered at securing "the living prey" in spite of his scruffy appearance, that he should be unable to see the fatuity of this glimpse of the humorless seducer chalking up his successes.

It is a curious fact that the more of himself a writer puts into his imaginative work, the more eager he is to assure the reader that his characters are not portraits of the artist. In the *Notebooks* Montherlant takes a swipe at the "stupidity" of readers who identify him with Costals, the unlovely protagonist of *Les Jeunes filles.* In the prefatory note to the first volume of that work he is more cautious. "If it is certain that the author has put something of himself into his character," he writes, "it is nevertheless a fact that he possesses a number of traits which belong to the purely objective world, which were chosen for reasons of art and which cannot be imputed to the person of the novelists."

Les Jeunes filles seems to me to be an essay in self-dramatization rather than a novel. The central character is evidently a glorified projection of his creator: the famous novelist pursued by a pack of foolish and importunate women, indulging alternately in "affectionate copulation" and downright cruelty; a mixture of sadist and sentimentalist; the humorless, slightly fatuous seducer of the *Notebooks* blown up to rather more than life-size.

Montherlant does not accept the view that, though he was drawing on people whom he had known in *Les Célibataires,* the story of the decline and fall of two decayed aristocrats, he himself is not to be found in it. He has said that the novelist is bound to project into his characters something of the "poor fish" who is present in all of us. I cannot share the general admiration for this novel or interest myself in the fate of Montherlant's two "poor fish." It seems to me to belong to the bad tradition inaugurated by Flaubert's *Bouvard and Pécuchet,* but to be without those mo-

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ments of nightmare horror which occasionally redeem that excessively boring work. In spite of Montherlant's praise for the supposedly high moral qualities of Auligny, the central character in *La Rose de sable* ("Desert Rose"), he is another "poor fish" whose rather messy affair with the Arab child is his only point of contact with the novelist. For in this book the author appears surely in M. de Guiscart, that vastly entertaining piece of self-caricature.

THE PLAYS are a different matter. Montherlant's practice, in some of the best of them, of choosing characters from history and setting them in earlier centuries produces a somewhat more balanced view of life. "There is in my work," he wrote in one of the epilogues to *Santiago,* "a Christian vein and a profane vein that I foster alternately or, as I felt almost inclined to say, simultaneously." The contradictions of the man are to be found not merely in the rotation of "Catholic" and "profane" plays, but in the contrast between the monkish figures and the Don Juan figures who dominate religious and secular plays respectively: Soeur Angélique in *Port-Royal,* Don Alvaro in *Santiago,* the Cardinal in *Le Cardinal d'Espagne* on the one hand; on the other, Ravier in *Celles qu'on prend dans les bras,* Malatesta and Don Juan in the plays which bear their names.

Stranger still, in spite of his sallies against the Church, Montherlant tells us (in the dedication to a priest) that *La Ville dont le prince est un enfant,* which deals with emotional relationships at a Catholic school, was written "on his knees." When published it aroused great interest in Catholic circles and he was pressed to allow it to be staged. He decided to consult the Cardinal-Archbishop of Paris who praised the play, but advised against production. Since receiving that advice Montherlant has firmly refused to permit any public performance by Catholic or secular interests.

In one of his prefaces Montherlant has suggested that there are affinities between French Jansenism and certain aspects of the Spanish Catholicism of the sixteenth century. It must be confessed that the Catholicism of the religious plays is a decidedly repellent brand. "I have not made Alvaro a model Christian," he says of the principal character in *Santiago,* "and there are times when he is a caricature of a Christian: almost a Pharisee. . . . What is his love of God if not love of himself? . . . His God is far more void than love." For Alvaro belongs like the dramatist to what Montherlant calls *la race des durs:* he is a "tough egg."

The external contrasts between religious and secular plays become in the religious plays a direct conflict between opposing forces: the forces of life and death. The protagonists of the Catholic plays indulge in a highly personal form of religion which warps and perverts their normal instincts and finally destroys them.

The Jansenists in *Port-Royal* set the pattern: they exhaust their best impulses in a misguided and destructive struggle against the authority of the Church; Alvaro refuses to engage in a military adventure which would provide his daughter with a dowry not because he really disapproves of it, but because he is against life, and the play closes with the withdrawal of father and daughter into a private world of seclusion.

The Cardinal in his most recent play has become a tyrant who uses religion as a cloak for his thirst for power and his cruelty. It seems evident that Montherlant was drawn to these forms of religion because they corresponded to certain impulses in his own make-up; that the sadistic streak in Ferrante, which gives *La Reine morte* its shattering ending, the overweening pride, the destructive asceticism, or what he elects to call "Roman puritanism," which we find in *Santiago* and *Port-Royal* are a reflection of something in the man himself.

MONTHERLANT'S most impressive achievement remains *La Reine morte.* Ferrante, King of Portugal, is planning for political reasons to marry his son to the Infanta of Navarre. He learns with dismay that Don Pedro is not merely in love with Dona Inez, but is secretly married to her and that she is expecting a child. A remarkable friendship grows up between the old king and the young wife which is analyzed with great subtlety, contrasting the warm, positive love of life of the young wife with the extreme aridity of soul of the aging tyrant. As the play with its disquieting sub-title—"How to kill women"—unfolds, we realize that it is bound to end in death and destruction. What makes its an arresting experience is the way in which Ferrante's sadistic impulses gradually gain the upper hand. For when he has Dona Inez assassinated it is not to undo a marriage which is politically undesirable, but to gratify his perverted instincts, to strike a final blow at life and love. As the news of the assassination is announced he himself has a stroke and drops dead on the stage, leaving the audience with an overwhelming sense of complete negation.

If *La Reine morte* is Montherlant's greatest achievement, it is also his most characteristic production. In spite of the emphasis that he places on life, happiness and pleasure in his essays and *Notebooks,* what we miss in all his writings is any positive principle which is capable of unifying the contradictions and producing an *oeuvre* instead of a series of brilliant *tours de force.* For neither his style nor his psychological acumen can blind us to the profoundly destructive attitude which underlies an apparently positive approach to experience, or to the fact that the uncommitted writer may be called on to make sacrifices which are at least as heavy and as damaging to the artist as those of the committed writer.

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The Ox Mountain Parable of Meng Tzu

by THOMAS MERTON

IN THE FOURTH and third centuries B.C., in an age, (like ours) of war and chaos, Meng Tzu, (Mencius) built on the spiritual foundations which had been laid by Confucius. One of his central intuitions was that human nature was basically good, but that this basic goodness was destroyed by evil acts, and had to be brought out by right education, education in "humaneness." The great man, said Mencius, is the man who has not lost the heart of a child. This statement was not meant to be sentimental. It implied the serious duty to preserve the spontaneous and deep natural instinct to love, that instinct which is preserved by the mysterious action of life itself and of providence, but which is destroyed by the wilfulness, the passionate arbitrariness of man's greed. In contrast to Mencius were Mo Tzu and the Legalist School, who wanted man to be forced into the path of an abstract universal love (Mo Tzu) by the force of law, and the threat of punishment (the Legalists). Man being evil, his evil tendencies had to be harnessed and exploited by the power of the Ruler. But Meng Tzu believed that man was good, and that the function of a wise and merciful Ruler was to bring out the goodness in his subjects by education. This is a parable of mercy. Note especially the emphasis of Meng Tzu on the "night wind" which is here rendered "night spirit," the merciful, persuasive and mysterious influence of unconscious nature which, according to him, as long as it is not tampered with, heals and revives man's tendencies, his "right mind." (*The following text is based on the literal translation given in the appendix to I. A. Richards'* Mencius on the Mind.)

Master Meng said: "There was once a fine forest on the Ox Mountain,
Near the capital of a populous country.
The men came out with axes and cut down the trees. Was it still a fine forest?
Yet, resting in the alternation of days and nights, moistened by dew,
The stumps sprouted, the trees began to grow again.
Then out came goats and cattle to browse on the young shoots.
The Ox Mountain was stripped utterly bare.
And the people, seeing it stripped utterly bare,
Think the Ox Mountain never had any woods on it at all.

Our mind too, stripped bare, like the Mountain,
Still cannot be without some basic tendency to love.
But just as men with axes, cutting down the trees every morning,
Destroy the beauty of the forest,
So we, by our daily actions, destroy our right mind.

Day follows night, giving rest to the murdered forest,
The moisture of the dawn spirit
Awakens in us the right loves, the right aversions.

With the actions of one morning we destroy this love,
And destroy it again. At last the night spirit
Is no longer able to revive our right mind.

Where, then, do our likes and dislikes differ from those of animals?
In nothing much.
Men see us, and say we never had in us anything but evil.
Is this man's nature?

Whatever is cultivated rightly, will surely grow.
Whatever is not cultivated rightly must surely perish.
Master Kung (Confucius) said:
    Grasp it firmly and you will keep it.
    Grasp it loosely, and it will vanish out of your hand.
    Its comings and goings have no fixed times:
    No one knows its country!
Of man's right mind, of this only does he speak!

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Poets on the New Frontier

by BETTE RICHART

PRESIDENT KENNEDY'S Inauguration was a great come-and-get-it day for poets, who are (or have been) resigned to doing without much of anything by way of official recognition. Since Plato ascribed to them the *furor poeticus,* and denied them a valid place in the Republic, poets have fared little better than plumbers, psychiatrists or hairdressers as objects of ridicule. Recently painters have been granted a reasonable prestige, and music has always had public interest and support to some degree: why has the poet, more than other artists, become the archetypal clown, a prime target for society's custard pies?

There are, I think, two reasons. One is fairly apparent: music, the visual arts, and of course ballet, yield something of their ore instantly. They do entertain —and certainly this attribute does not limit either their value or their meaning. Nevertheless, this is precisely what poetry cannot do. The first thing it demands of us is a lonely concentration; poetry is a laboratory project. Its rewards differ from those of science, but like science it is a way of investigation. If revelation—that is, a new dimension of experience—is involved, as I am sure it is, it can only follow drudgery on the part of the audience as well as even greater drudgery on the part of the poet.

Poetry asks another difficult thing: self-evaluation at the risk of self-criticism. Because poetry aims, perhaps above all else, at high accuracy in the use of language, it is closely related to the kind of spade work that psychiatrists and semanticists are doing. To denude a word of its encrusted misuses involves seeing ourselves more clearly; poets have been analysts since the beginning. It is doubtful therefore that they will ever be popular.

President Kennedy's recognition of one of the greatest living poets becomes the more fortuitous in the light of these somewhat wry considerations. Frost himself put it very well in that eulogy which became the more famous for, finally, not being read on the day of Inauguration:

> Summoning artists to participate
> In the august occasions of the State
> Seems something for us all to celebrate.

In this new preface to his familiar poem, "The Gift Outright," Frost inevitably sounds like himself imitating himself at times, but he said two things which seem to be strong arguments in favor of longevity. It is amazing that a man over eighty could still be capable of saying that the Declaration of Independence "made the least tribe want to be a nation," and "This turbulence we're in the middle of is something we can hardly help but love." These are political insights, not idle platitudes, and it is heartening to think they were uttered by a poet.

Frost's presence at this "august occasion of the State" reminded me of a forgotten masterpiece of rhetoric—Shelley's "Defense of Poetry"—and its ringing conclusion: "Poets are the unacknowledged legislators of the world." Well, today they are being acknowledged, I thought, and I suppose many people were thinking something of the sort.

THE LINK between Shelley's old-fashioned essay and the present political situation turns out upon examination to be a very significant one. Some weeks after the Inauguration the President himself remarked, "I think politicians and poets share at least one thing, and that is that their greatness depends upon the courage with which they meet the challenges of life." Like many newly current views, this one is a far cry from the merely popular. The President has elevated the poet—that bajazzo, that clown—to the rank of statesman.

The choice was an excellent one, though not necessarily the most obvious. Arthur Schlesinger, Jr. seems to have been right in attributing a high level of taste to the new Administration—and certainly he is right to imply that taste is as important in politics as in the arts. President Kennedy seems more likely than any other President so far to bring feeling and form, in Suzanne Langer's evocative phrase, to politics.

The recognition of Frost would have been applauded by Shelley on several counts, I believe. Most importantly, Frost does not shun the role of moralist, in the sense in which Shelley used the word. Free of the burdens of rhetoric for once, he explains what he means: "The great secret of morals is love. . . . A man, to be greatly good, must imagine intensely and comprehensively; he must put himself in the place of another and of many others; the pleasures and pains of

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his species must become his own." This has remained one of my favorite definitions of morality, and surely no one demonstrates it more sensitively than Frost, who seems utterly to inhabit men whose lives are as alien to his own as lives could well be: the hired man as well as the farmer who hired him; the isolated mountain couple who went into debt for an atrocious player piano, "to get some color and music out of life"; above all, those immortal witches of Grafton and Coös. Great statesmen too must be capable of charity on this level, since few of the lives in their care will very much resemble their own. In modern America, a President must live, in imagination, on tugboats, in coal mines, on airplanes; he is linked with poets in charity as well as in courage.

Shelley names yet another way in which poets share the destiny of politicians: "All the authors of revolutions in opinion are necessarily poets," he says. Poets must be more, not less, socially aware than other men. This viewpoint is far from being universally acknowledged, even among the literary; even people who read poetry with lively appreciation often consider poets as lovable incompetents—in the modern world especially, an unjust indictment. If Protestants, as the *mot* alleges, see in every man a Pope, many Catholics as well as Protestants see in every poet a Swinburne, incapable of buying a ticket and getting on a train alone, much less of beginning a revolution in opinion.

Nothing, of course, could be farther from the truth. It seems timely to recall that Chaucer and Milton were civil servants, Paul Claudel and St. John Perse in the diplomatic service, T. S. Eliot a publishing executive, Wallace Stevens (of all people) an insurance executive, Merrill Moore and William Carlos Williams doctors of eminence in their special fields, psychiatry and pediatrics. The list is very nearly inexhaustible. More than artists of any other kind, poets have excelled in ways quite remote from their art—partly, alas, because they have had to. Poets cannot pay butcher, baker or piper without supplementing their incomes, customarily through teaching or writing reviews and criticism. But with a few spectacular exceptions, like Dylan Thomas, poets manage their affairs very well, supplying few facts to feed the extravagant fancy that they are, in general, inept.

SHELLEY says that a society in which poets would have a voice would be marked by "equality, diversity, unity, contrast, and mutual dependence." This is the world the New Frontier should be. It is a world in which poets and egg-heads may have a peaceful co-existence, if not a downright productive one, with their less gifted and often resentful brethren. One does not expect "authors of revolutions in opinion" to become popular idols (at least not for centuries) but it is something if they can even be accepted.

When Frost said, years ago, that he had a lover's quarrel with the world, he was summarizing the dilemma of the doer. One must love the world as it is before one can understand, and wish to remedy, its follies—or at least the few follies which may lie within one's reach to remedy. Shelley says the poet "beholds intensely the present as it is," and certainly, if true, this ability is another bond with statesmen. Herndon said of Lincoln that "everything came to him exactly as it was, in its precise color and shape"; possibly only people of whom this is true should participate in inaugurations. Poets and Presidents alike, then, should see and love the world as it is, without being content to leave its errors and agonies untouched.

Poets and Presidents embark upon dangers, but Camus has truly said that danger makes men classical; the idea of an Augustan revival in twentieth century America, of all places, is fraught with a somewhat ironical delight. Here, of all places! one cannot help thinking. And eagerness to see *belles lettres* achieving validity on the national scene could easily betray us into overemphasis. The grand old age of Frost, the hopeful youth of the Kennedys, their beautiful concern lest he fumble his great day, set up a memorably moving drama, irrespective of other implications. To be a seismograph of feeling at eighty-odd is a poetic triumph in itself.

Frost is what Eliot once said old men should be: an explorer. He would be a marvel even if he were a carpenter, and not America's monument. Michael Hamburger recently remarked that it is easier to be a young poet than a middle-aged one, and to be an old poet is the greatest achievement of all. No doubt of it, Frost's personal grandeur, the Greek spell of ancient wisdom that he now casts, contributed to the classical feeling of the inauguration, and to the hopes of an Augustan interlude which sprang up in writers everywhere.

The true poetry of Rome, according to Shelley, lived in its institutions; perhaps eventually our poetry too, living first in itself, will find new life in government, and so extend to the lives of people in a new and far-reaching way. A relevant anecdote is told of St. John Perse. A colleague in government, hearing a rumor (years after his fame was established under a pseudonym) that he wrote poetry, inquired about it. "Absolutely false," snapped that Nobel prize-winner-to-be. One can only hope for a world in which poets of that stature may dare to proclaim themselves.

The cornerstone for such a world may have been laid at the Inauguration. For in courage, in imaginative charity, in originality and a classical feeling for reality, poets and Presidents have uniquely noble bonds. Of course, we are speaking only of the very greatest poets and Presidents—another question entirely, and one that only time will answer.

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THE SCREEN

THE WASTE LAND

BETWEEN THE SYMBOLS at the beginning and end of "La Dolce Vita" is a series of episodes showing what's wrong with modern society. And what's seen as wrong with it is mainly an excess of sex, an exorbitance that leads to corruption, decadence and weary boredom. This excess is encouraged and exploited by the modern press, whose writers cover sensationally every aspect of the wretched goings-on and whose photographers hover continuously around the famous and infamous to snap one more picture, preferably lurid, to attract readers to papers and magazines. The main character in the film, and the only one to appear in every episode, is a third-rate newspaper man, a rather wishy-washy fellow whose beat is Rome's Via Veneto and the sleazy crowds, the flashy cafe society, who frequent this well-known street and other neighborhoods where columnists can pick up choice bits of gossip and scandal.

We first see this fellow with his ever-present photographer in a helicopter flying over Rome. They are pursuing another helicopter from which is hanging a large statue of Christ that is being flown to St. Peter's Square. But the attention of the writer and photographer is drawn from the Christ to some semi-nude girls who are sunbathing. And at the end of this lengthy, three-hour picture, we see this writer, now a cheap publicist and sunk to the level of the society he covers, wandering in the grey dawn on a beach after a night's orgy. Some fishermen have just caught in their nets a fishy monster, odoriferous and repulsive as anything ever pulled out of the sea. Even the writer and his companions are disgusted with this loathsome thing—just as they are aware of what they have become. But when an innocent young girl tries to call to the writer, he cannot hear her message. And as the film ends on this bitter note of desolation, the writer wearily rejoins his friends.

Federico Fellini, who directed the film and had a hand in the writing of the script, spares no sensibilities in his ironically titled "Sweet Life." Right from the opening scene with the statue of Christ, he swings into a nightclub sequence that ends with the reporter (excellently played by Marcello Mastroianni) going to a prostitute's apartment with a wealthy, pleasure-seeking nymphomaniac (Anouk Aimee). And this is followed by the suicide attempt of the reporter's mistress (Yvonne Fourneau), a rather pathetic figure who turns up in several of the episodes as she tries in vain to win her lover to marriage. In the next vignette, the reporter covers the arrival in Rome of a bosomy Hollywood star (almost too cleverly satirized by Anita Ekberg) whose night on the town includes a wild dance at the lovely Caracalla ruins and a shower in the Trevi fountain.

For a while it looks as if the wayward reporter, who always joins his subjects in their bizarre fun, is going to change under the influence of an intellectual friend (Alain Cuny) whose thoughtfulness and seemingly happy, normal home life inspire the writer to something better, but the turn of events in connection with this friend leads the reporter to even greater disillusion. The film's most moving episode is built around the reporter's efforts to entertain his father whose life hasn't been exactly exemplary; and one of the most tragic incidents in this "Sweet Life" concerns the aura of sensationalism and circus atmosphere brought on by the gullible public and television directors when two lying children insist that the Blessed Virgin appeared to them.

But the two most elaborate and widely discussed episodes in "La Dolce Vita" are the night with the aristocrats, in which the reporter mingles in a handsome old castle with the world-weary uppercrust whose straining to have fun takes the form of a spectacular charade, and a later night in a seaside villa, where the reporter and his companion, a conglomeration of artists, actors, dancers, licentious and homosexual hangers-on, try to smother their boredom in an orgy. Both episodes are exceedingly well acted—as is the whole film—by professionals and amateurs, many of whom are playing themselves. And both episodes, steeped as they are in degradation, mince no words about their participants or the decay of the society they represent.

"La Dolce Vita" is a vast panorama of corruption, a sort of Dante-esque unholy comedy that screams for righting. Giuseppe Amato has given the film a first-rate production with a very large and good cast (some of whom turn up in only one incident), excellent black-and-white photography, and the superb direction of Fellini who master-minded the whole show. But in a way it is a cold picture. Unlike Michelangelo Antonioni's "L'Avventura," which also covers a similarly decadent society but which draws the viewer into the scene, "La Dolce Vita" aloofly displays the evils and makes the viewer draw his own conclusions. Except in a very few scenes, it has neither the compassion or universality of Fellini's earlier great films, "La Strada" and "Nights of Cabiria." It covers a much wider field than either of those Fellini films, but at the same time it is concerned only with the rot in society today; and it risks being sensational in its vivid portrayal of part of contemporary life. However, Fellini means to stun his audience with his diagnosis; and with that he has been eminently successful. Each viewer must decide the cure for himself.

PHILIP T. HARTUNG.

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OF NOTE

CATHOLICS AND THE PRESENT

IN AN ADDRESS at the fifty-eighth annual convention of the National Catholic Educational Association, Father Theodore M. Hesburgh, C.S.C., president of the University of Notre Dame, discussed "Catholic Higher Education in Twentieth Century America." An excerpt from that address follows:

. . . I have always shared the honest pride that legitimately attaches to a proud intellectual heritage. I have likewise always been uneasy at the correlative pattern of looking backward more often than forward, of holding to the tradition of what has been, rather than striving mightily to make the traditional values more relevant, more vital, more meaningful today. . . .

Personally, I have no ambition to be a medieval man. I suspect that St. Thomas in his day had no hankering to be classified as belonging to the golden age of the Latin Fathers of the Church, then long past. Whatever the value of the various ages of Catholic higher learning, there is only one age whose value we can in any measure influence: our own. We can see ourselves as part of a long tradition. We can measure the vitality of our current contribution against the intellectual contribution of other ages, but one factor is absolutely essential to any judgment or any comparison: the vitality of Catholic higher learning in any particular age must be viewed mainly in relation to its intellectual influence and effectiveness in that particular age.

It is futile comfort for a Catholic university in the second half of the twentieth century in the United States of America to point with pride to the lively intellectuality and critical vitality of the Catholic University of Paris in medieval France. Let the dead bury their dead. We of the living have our work at hand. It is vital, intellectual, and exciting work that only a university can do. Perhaps the most exciting feature of all is the valid presumption that some of the work can most fruitfully be undertaken only by a Catholic institution of higher learning in the best tradition of the peak eras of Christian wisdom.

May I first be a little negative, and say clearly what I do not mean. The task for the Catholic higher learning will not be done if our philosophers and theologians continue to live among, work with, and speak to people and problems long since dead and buried. This inhabitation of a never-never world by those who speak for Christian wisdom would be bad enough in a day without problems of its own. But today we live in an age of monumental and unprecedented problems. This is no day in which to nit-pick among the problems of the past.

Here is an age crying for the light and guidance of Christian wisdom. What must future judges think of us if we live in the most exciting age of science ever known to mankind, and philosophize mainly about Aristotle's physics? We live today in the threatening shadow of cosmic thermonuclear destruction and often theologize about the morality of war as though the spear had not been superseded by the I.C.B.M.

If we are to create a peak for the Catholic higher learning today, two essential requirements at least are crystal clear: One, we must understand the present day world in which we live, with all of the forces and realities that make it what it is; and two, those two best and most unique assets we have, philosophy and theology, must begin to be more relevant to the agonizing, very real, and monumental problems of our times. . . .

The key word for the task, as I see it, is *mediation.* One could spend much time discussing this word, a good and priestly word, a word that speaks of the innermost reality of the Incarnation. Catholic higher education can, in our times, perform an important mediatorial function. Catholic higher education stands for something definite, definable, and, I trust, something true, good, beautiful, and timeless. The world is disjointed today in so many ways, fragmented into so many disparate parts, that one might look far to find a more inspiring, more important, or more central task for the Catholic higher learning than the exalted work of mediation in our times.

Allow me to illustrate this work of intellectual mediation. Many of our most pressing domestic problems today arise from the fact that we live in a multi-faceted, pluralistic society. How urgent it is that some institution attempt to bring together in more fruitful unity the separated and often antagonistic elements of this pluralistic society. Economically there is the pluralism of labor and management. Socially there is the pluralism of the two races, white and colored, with regional sub-problems for Mexicans and Puerto Ricans. Religiously there is the pluralism of Protestants, Catholics, and Jews, or perhaps more fundamentally the basic dichotomy between the religious and the secularists. Intellectually there is the pluralism of science and technology vis-a-vis the humanities—the C. P. Snow-described dilemma of two great intellectual currents that neither understand or speak to each other despite the fact that they live daily side-by-side in our universities.

What are we doing to mediate, philosophically and theologically, as only the Catholic higher learning can, between these various extremes that make up the divided fabric of our society? Here is an objective worthy of our most talented, most devoted, most inspired efforts. There is nothing humdrum, nothing prosaic about these most anguishing problems of man

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in the twentieth century. Their solutions require the highest theological and philosophical principles, the deepest empirical studies, the most imaginative approaches, the most understanding directives—but what are we doing to bring intellectual and moral light to these regions of darkness?

We are doing something about labor-management problems, but mostly on a pragmatic, non-intellectual level. As to civil rights and equal opportunity for all races, we have been almost universally destitute of intellectual leadership in our colleges and universities. I know of no research in this area. Factually, the worst educational problem at the moment is in a section of the country predominantly Catholic. Despite the central Catholic doctrine of the Mystical Body, the pronouncements of our Holy Fathers and our hierarchy, there are Catholic schools and Catholic parishes and Catholic lay organizations, and Catholic orders and Catholic neighborhoods that do not only not welcome, but which positively repel Negroes from their midst. . . .

And what is the work of mediation in the field of religious pluralism? Again we live in an ecumenical age. Our Holy Father says to a large group of Jewish visitors to Rome: "I am Joseph, your brother." How many of us have extended that welcome within our institutions and have tried to understand our differences in our research and studies? A new Ecumenical Council looms before us. In Europe, for many years since they were brought together in the crucible of common suffering during the war, Protestant and Catholic theologians have discussed their differences and merged their common strengths against their common enemies of secularism and Communism. Why have we been so timid here in our American institutions of higher learning? Must we always be the last to initiate anything imaginative and intellectual, the first only in those obvious causes like anti-Communism, super-patriotism, and old clothing drives? Here is another urgent work of mediation long overdue.

I hesitate to undertake the discussion of the intellectual mediation needed between science, technology, and the humanities, because here I easily become vehement, almost in an apoplectic manner. We took the wrong turn in science as far back as Galileo, and while the roadmaps have been officially corrected since, we are still lagging far behind the main flow of traffic in the area of science and technology. I need not document this assertion for there has already been enough public breast-beating in the matter. Besides, I am interested here not so much in diagnosing the past as in charting a present-day and future course.

That the roads of science and technology may lead to fruitful human goals is obvious enough to anyone who understands or appreciates the new vistas opened up by science and technology. Science is our potent key to the noble modern human quest to eliminate illiteracy, needless poverty and squalor, hunger, disease, and homelessness in our times. Science can help man achieve the basic material conditions essential to a life worthy of man's inner and God-given dignity. Science can have true cultural and spiritual overtones, too, may indeed contribute mightily to the good life, if only we provide for it the ultimate meaning, direction, and human significance that it must seek outside itself. . . .

The main reason that we have not mediated in the Catholic higher learning between science and the humanities is that we have generally neglected science and have not particularly distinguished ourselves in the humanities either. Perhaps the latter fault is greater, for here was our true and most obvious heritage. We must redouble our efforts today in both areas if they are mutually to enrich each other in our total perspective of higher learning. Without this particular mediation between science and the humanities, and all it implies, there really will be no truly significant or relevant Catholic higher learning in our times. These are hard words, but, I believe, true ones. *Qui potest capere, capiat.*

There is another whole area of mediation that is open today to the Catholic higher learning, if we would find the courage to climb the peak. I refer here to the opportunities for intellectual mediation in a pluralistic world. Catholics belonging to a universal Church should be at home in international affairs, but I fear that the American Catholic spirit, somehow untouched by our higher learning, has traditionally been characterized by a narrow parochial spirit, an isolationist complex, an anti-United Nations urge. What has the Catholic higher learning in America done to mediate understanding of the great world cultures, the important emerging areas—even the Catholic ones like Latin America—the dichotomy between cold war and international law? Here is a challenge that we can hardly avoid and hope to be relevant in our times.

By now, I am sure that you all see, upon reflection, that here is much of Newman in modern dress. May I conclude by hoping that all engaged in the important work of our Catholic colleges and universities see the importance and the urgency of my dual thesis: first, that the Catholic higher learning must ever strive to make the ancient wisdom timely today, relevant to our current problems, and, secondly, that the road to this accomplishment, the simple word that sums up a modern and thrilling objective for the Catholic higher learning in our times is mediation—mediation that understands both extremes that must be brought together, mediation based upon empirical current fact, as well as timeless principle, mediation that is not afraid to blaze new trails in new wildernesses: that both God and man may be well served in our times and in this new world that so needs new applications of the ancient Christian wisdom.

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A Brilliant and Thorough Contemplation of Dramatic Art

THE DEATH OF TRAGEDY. By George Steiner. Knopf. $5.00.

By RICHARD GILMAN

NEAR THE END of this long essay on the decline of tragic drama George Steiner expresses a credo that might more serviceably have appeared at the beginning. "I believe that literary criticism has about it neither rigour nor proof," he writes. "Where it is honest, it is passionate, private experience seeking to persuade." You can't ask for anything fairer than that, but it might, as I say, have better been told to us earlier, criticism of this kind not being to everyone's taste.

It is, with slight reservations, very much to my own taste, I had better say before I go further; without at all gainsaying the achievements of the textualists, I believe we need more of this kind of "old criticism," as Steiner has elsewhere described it, provided it's understood that something quite different from Van Wyck Brooks or J. Donald Adams is meant by the term. Mr. Steiner is no literary sociologist or patriot, nor is he a Houseman poised at his mirror ready to slice his throat at the memory of some devastating line. You will find here almost as close a reading of texts as is being performed at Chicago or Gambier, Ohio.

You will also find as brilliant, thorough and concerned a contemplation of the nature of dramatic art as has appeared in many years. Steiner doesn't have a profoundly original thesis, which along with the self-imposed limitation on his subject—there is scarcely any discussion of comedy—keeps me from placing his book in the company of such ur-works of recent drama criticism as Eric Bentley's *Playwright as Thinker,* Francis Fergusson's *Idea of a Theater* and H.D.F. Kitto's *Form and Meaning in Drama,* but *The Death of Tragedy* seems to me to rank not far below.

Steiner starts from the obvious fact that there has been no high tragic art since Corneille and Racine and the Elizabethans, and from the only slightly less evident truth that the history of the drama since then has been largely a simultaneous flight from the tragic and an unending attempt to resurrect it. There have been magnificent approaches —he cites Milton's *Samson Agonistes* and the plays of Schiller—immensely fertile suggestions—some of Byron's works for a "mental theater," the plays of Kleist and Buchner—radical efforts to revitalize the genre by using the resources of other arts— Wagner's massive experiment. And there is the almost miraculous achievement of Ibsen, "the most important playwright after Shakespeare and Racine."

But there has been no breakthrough; the possibilities Ibsen opened up for a new kind of tragic drama have not been seized upon, and tragedy, in any of the imprecise but commonly understood meanings we give to the word, has not been found possible.

Steiner, it should be said, doesn't presume to offer an airtight definition of tragedy. He describes it as having to do with the "fact of catastrophe," and as a "deliberate advance to the edge of life, where the mind must look upon blackness at the risk of vertigo"; he argues that it does not "speak of secular dilemmas which may be resolved by rational innovations, but of the unalterable bias toward inhumanity and destruction in the drift of the world," and notes that it is "the form of art which requires the intolerable burden of God's presence." All of which helps us to know and to accept his premises.

His chief premise is that what gave the death-blow to tragic drama was the great change in Western habits of mind that occurred in the Seventeenth Century, the change from symbolic, allegorical, mythological modes of perception and cognition to rational and scientific ones. "After Shakespeare the master spirits of western consciousness are no longer the blind seers, the poets, or Orpheus performing his art in the face of Hell. They are Descartes, Newton and Voltaire." And needing as does no other form of art the presence in human affairs of the supernatural, the sacramental, the ideas of divine retribution and preordainment, as well as an overriding sense of the irrational, tragic drama succumbed before the gradual emptying of these notions and their receding hold on men.

As I have said, this isn't strikingly original. But what gives Steiner's book its great value is the almost unbelievable erudition he brings to his account of the process (multilingual, he provides excellent translations of his quotations from French and German), the subtlety and acuteness of his analyses of particular plays and the enveloping atmosphere of rich seriousness which his critical approach distills.

I haven't space to do more than mention some of the questions he treats: the nature of neo-classic tragedy; the unavailing attempt of the romantics to restore the tragic ideal; the deadening effect of Shakespeare's example on the English dramatists who came after him; the anti-tragic nature of Christianity; the rise of the novel as the literary form most able to express the new age of reason and secular values; the existence of poetry as the traditional vehicle for tragedy and the growth of the possibility of its replacement by prose.

This last theme brings Steiner to a consideration of recent efforts to recapture the spirit of classical tragedy, either through verse dramas or the recasting of Greek myths or the two together. Yeats has some splendid moments, he says; Eliot catches a shadow of the real thing; but they don't bring it off, and when we drop below their level we are faced with embarrassment. "The verse tragedies of modern European and American poets are exercises in archeology and attempts to blow fire into cold ash."

The weakest sections of the book

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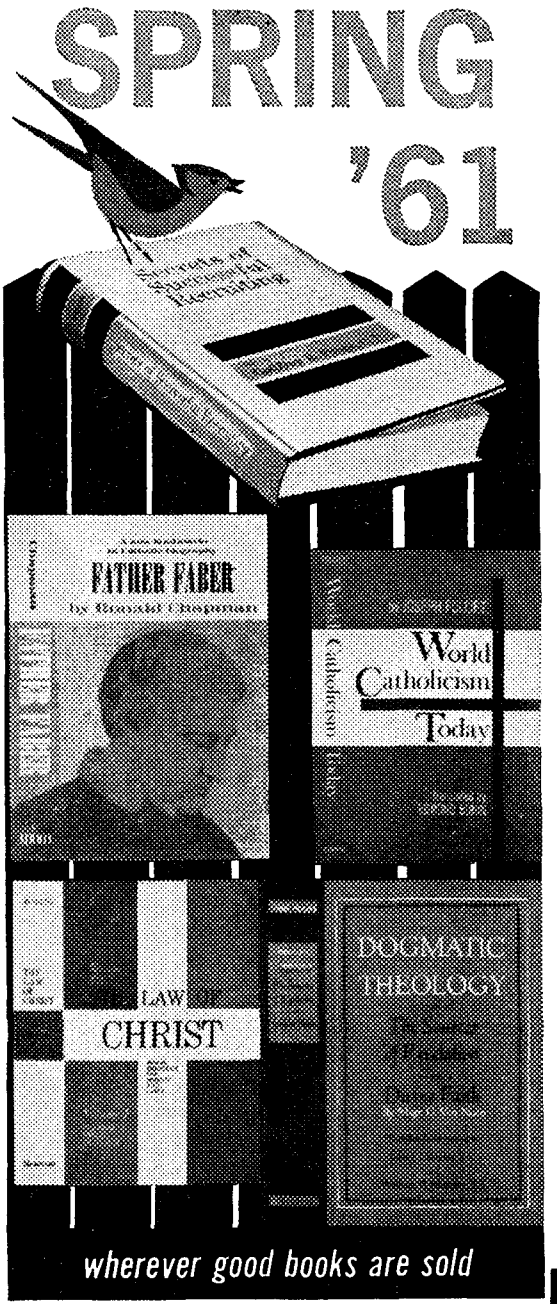

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are those on contemporary drama. Not that there's anything wrong with Steiner's basic judgment on poets in the theater (although he does fail, inexplicably, to mention Lorca). The trouble is with his leit motif, which begins to operate in these last pages as a dogma and a principal of exclusion. "The classic leads to a dead past," he says. "The metaphysics of Christianity and Marxism are anti-tragic. That, in essence, is the dilemma of modern tragedy."

But what is left is just what Steiner fails to take up sufficiently or else downgrades: the possibilities articulated by Chekhov; the theaters of Strindberg and Pirandello; those of Camus and Sartre; the revolutionary new stage of Becket, Ionescu, Adamov and Genet. Brecht alone seriously interests Steiner among recent writers who have made any kind of advance. I can't quarrel with admiration of Brecht, but I think there are other promising directions opening, including the possibility of a radical revaluation of our entire concept of tragedy, such as is being worked out in the novels and critical writings of Alain Robbe-Grillet.

This partial myopia stems, I think, from an understandable desire to protect a thesis, and also from a subtle mistrust of consciousness in the drama on Steiner's part. It is the sort of thing that leads him to make the remark that over the characters in Schiller's Don Carlos "there hangs too vivid a cast of thought. Schiller would be among the first of those whom Eric Bentley referred to as the 'playwright as thinker.'" This is a tiresome mistake; Bentley meant nothing like that. What he did mean is that the playwright thinks, that thought is as necessary to him as imagination and that from Ibsen on dramatists have tried to recreate a theater of depth and significance by thinking even more acutely and strategically than before.

But I don't want to leave on that note. There is no critic without a blind spot. And the virtues of Steiner's book are such that the blindness is more than compensated for by a dozen sources of light.

1950-1960: A POEM

A rooster flexing a wing at a time, testing
each leg for a step, a calf's saliva smeared
and frozen to its pelt, the stanchioned cow
with wrinkled udders cold until they swell
and soften in my milking palms and cross
their steaming bursts in buckets vised by knees,
a bull obliviously munching mash
or fodder in a sideways chomp of jaws,
the barn cathedral-still, alfalfa baled
with cloverhay and storied to the beams,
an uncooped chicken pecking at the planks . . .

of barrack bunks, sleepers clippered to the scalp,
shared mirrors for shaves, the squat of soldiers grim
and sallow-flanked in defecation, webs
of fungus in a riflethong removed
before inspection, manual-of-arms,
exchanged salutes, the upright duffel bags
unpacked in heated huts in Quantico,
chiggers in neckflesh and underneath the belt,
disburser's fingers gritty with the dirt
of money, generals reviewing right-
faced ranks, a daub of cosmoline on butts . . .

of slim cigars, a saunter down the dark
of streets where squad cars idle at a curb
like hounds alert to follow shortwaved spoors,
my war bonds cashed to pay a spindled stack
of bills at each semester's summoning,
placement directors flanked by telephones,
a quiver of sharpened pencils splayed point up
from drinking cups beside their doodler's pads,
the gravestone of a nameplate on a desk,
the antiseptic cleanliness of schools
at dawn, freshmen confused by Caesar's wars . . .

through poetry with English majors tense
in dialectic, furious with truth,
the way of kisses, rings and marrying,
waking to a wife, contour of womanshape
beneath a quilt, the fingers loose with sleep,
the fierce ballet of baseball in July,
the Adirondack noons when matted boards
buck upward with a snap to catapult
the divers flexed into the roped-off deep,
two uncles buried, one in rain and one
in torpor, nephews aging as I age.

Buried in my blood the farm, the dust of hay,
the foxholes spaded in Virginia's fields,
the students as they were, myself as I was
through those ten requiems that toll me forth
to this new decade waiting to be won.
Resisted still the muskrat urge to stow
and nest and dream of calendars to come.
Distrusted still the lure of retrospect . . .
I banish now the new years with the old
and seek no future but the given day
to live my dying in the risen world.

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By VIVIAN MERCIER

C'EST magnifique, mais ce n'est pas Racine, must be the verdict on Robert Lowell's verse translation of *Phèdre.* Since he begins his note "On Translating *Phèdre*" with the words "Racine's plays are generally and correctly thought to be untranslatable," Mr. Lowell will not be greatly disturbed by this judgment. He has produced a free rendering, which corresponds to the French scene-by-scene, if not line-by-line, and retains much of the original's power to harrow the emotions. I tried the translation on a reader who knew nothing of *Phèdre* except the play's vast reputation; she read it right through at a sitting, unable to put the book down, and felt that the experience was akin to reading a Greek tragedy in English verse. One can assume, therefore, that a performance of the Lowell translation would grip at least an off-Broadway audience. As no English translation of Racine appears to have been performed or performable since the early eighteenth century, Mr. Lowell deserves to be congratulated.

Nevertheless, reading his version constitutes an emotional experience quite alien from that conveyed by a reading of Racine. At first sight, the matter and the manner of the French dramatist seem to be hopelessly at odds with each other. A Greek myth full of sex and gore is interpreted in a versification rigid to the point of monotony and a vocabulary restricted and generalized to the point where only clichés seem possible. Eventually one discovers, as always, that a great writer can transmute the most opaque medium into flawless crystal. The tension—tug-of-war, really—between horror and decorum becomes Racine's greatest asset.

Mr. Lowell, perhaps unfortunately for him, does not labor under the same restraints: his heroic couplets are far looser than Racine's paired alexandrines, while his vocabulary and imagery range far more widely than contemporary taste allowed Racine's to do. Yet Mr. Lowell, when he raises his voice from forte or mezzo forte to fortissimo, obviously cannot administer anything like the shock communicated by Racine's few leaps from his customary piano to fortissimo; for example,

Ce n'est plus une ardeur dans
mes veines cachée;
C'EST VÉNUS TOUT EN-
TIÈRE À SA PROIE
ATTACHÉE.

(Those capitals are mine, not Racine's, but don't imagine for a moment that I'm foolish enough to attempt a translation.) It would be cruelly unfair to judge Mr. Lowell by his rendering of this, the most famous couplet in the play. Instead, look at this passage in the great scene where Phaedra gradually confesses her love for her stepson Hippolytus:

No, Phaedra would have snatched
your burning torch,
and lunged before you, reeling
like a priest
of Dionysus to distract the beast.
I would have reached the final
corridor
a lap before you, and killed the
Minotaur!
Lost in the labyrinth, and at
your side,
would it have mattered, if I lived
or died?

Compare this fairly representative sample of the Lowell translation with a literal prose rendering of the French, which contains no torch, no priest, no lunging or reeling, no killing of the Minotaur: "Sharing the peril which you had to seek, I myself would have wished to walk ahead of you; and Phaedra, going down into the labyrinth with you, would with you have escaped or perished." Racine employs the simple repetition of "with you" to convey much that Mr. Lowell does not trust himself to get across without the help of impassioned imagery. For all his elegance and formality, the tension which Racine generates resembles that in early

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Hemingway dialogue rather than that which Mr. Lowell produces by wholly different means.

Jacques Barzun faced the opposite problem in translating *Le Mariage de Figaro:* there, it is not Beaumarchais' formality but his informality that becomes a stumbling-block. Beaumarchais himself remarked in his preface to the play, "If I were unlucky enough to have [a style], I would constrain myself to forget it while writing a comedy. . . ." A little later in the same passage, he points out that "each character in it [*Le Mariage*] speaks his own idiomatic speech [*langage*]. "Mr. Barzun, in *his* preface, shows that he is fully aware of the problem which this differentiation through speech creates for a translator. It seems to me that by and large he has solved this problem satisfactorily, without however attempting to translate the play into modern colloquial American. As he writes, "Beaumarchais' idiomatic simplicity rarely drops into crude colloquialism."

Le Mariage de Figaro has gained a reputation quite out of keeping with its true greatness. I remember how disappointed I was when I first read this supposedly daring play, of which Napoleon said that it was "the Revolution already in action." By the time it appeared, the few "ideas" which it contained were commonplace everywhere except on the censored stage and, possibly, in the pulpit. As Mozart's opera shows, the play is primarily a swift, high-spirited comedy of situation containing a number of sharp insights into character.

Mr. Barzun views it in this light, as his preface shows, but he describes Beaumarchais as "a great jumping wit," which perhaps he was until Shaw broke the seven-foot limit in that kind of high jump. The new translation certainly preserves Beaumarchais' wit almost everywhere that it occurs, but the wit comes a bad third after situation and character. Beaumarchais was a second-rate philosopher and social reformer but a first-rate man of the theatre, as Mr. Barzun's faithful rendering abundantly demonstrates.

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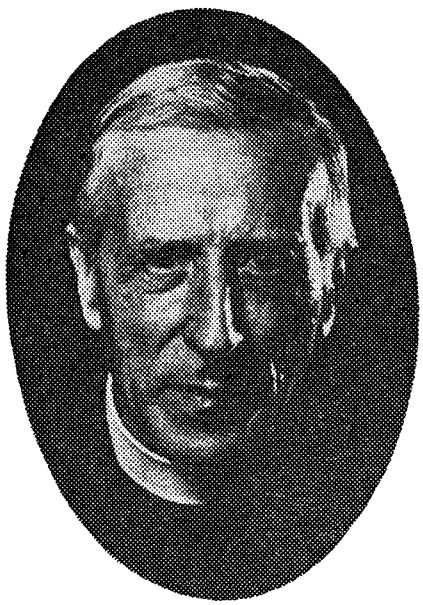

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Writer in Embryo

AN ONLY CHILD. By Frank O'Connor. Knopf. $4.50.

By ELIZABETH BARTELME

"I WAS always very fond of heights," remarks Frank O'Connor at one point in this first volume (one assumes it must be that) of his autobiography. And surely this is the classic account, painful and humorous, of the boy at the foot of the mountain, searching for handholds to pull himself up to the plateaus where the peaks are closer and the valleys remote.

It was a deep valley this child, Michael O'Donovan, found himself born into. The slums of Cork discouraged mountain climbing as a matter of course, and the author's father, very much one with his environment, had a way of dismissing his son's ambitions with "better fed than taught," a phrase meant to disparage and keep the boy in his place. His mother, however, with love and firmness struggled to keep her son from enduring the kind of life she had had, and this is as much a memoir of Minnie O'Donovan as it is Frank O'Connor's story.

She was a unique woman. Orphaned as a little girl, she had been brought up in the Good Shepherd Orphanage and eventually sent out to work as a housemaid. When she married, her desire for a home of her own was fierce, and it was her great misfortune (though she loved him) to have chosen a man who was an unstable drunkard, a man of little vision, and one whose dependence and weakness forced her into becoming his support in every sense of the word. Her strength was monumental, and truly, as seen through her son's eyes, she was a woman of nobility, charm and piety, the perfect woman, her tenderness matched only by her fortitude.

It is no wonder that Michael O'Donovan worshipped his mother, but by contrast he despised his father. His childhood was one agony of embarrassment after another as he waited outside pubs for Mick O'Donovan to close them, as

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he sat in the kitchen watching his father paring his corns, as he regarded with acute distaste his paternal relatives whose physical and mental habits offended the sensitive boy. Yet, as can now be seen in O'Connor's stories, particularly the earlier ones, it was grist for the mill. The life may have been unbearable in many ways, but it had its farcical side too, and the embryo writer missed none of it.

His first attempts to settle himself into a "steady" job are little gems of comedy, the kind of comedy that at any moment may turn into tragedy but somehow manages to pull itself together just at the moment when it teeters dangerously. This sense of comedy is even stronger when O'Connor describes his efforts at getting an education, or, more accurately, what he thought an education should be. Languages fascinated him, but it never occurred to him that grammar had anything to do with learning German, French or Gaelic, and it was years later that he discovered that he had been industriously and happily translating from one language that he didn't know into another that was equally mysterious.

This cockeyed air of seizing the brass ring with both eyes shut pervades the whole book. Nowhere is it more noticeably than in O'Connor's revolutionary experience. The Irish Republican Army was his head-on encounter with an idealism in which he could share; it was also an encounter with an unreality so absurd that it gave the death blow to many of the beliefs that had sustained him through a miserable childhood and an adolescence of more than the ordinary frustrations.

Looking backward, he found the I.R.A. experience a farce, the whole revolutionary ideal based on a mystique that simply did not exist. His bitterness extended to the Church, and he turned his back on both his country and Catholicism. One feels that his pain was too great, his emotional capacities too damaged to reintegrate his life within the areas in which it had been cast; he had to strike out and away from everything.

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that marks this book most strongly. It is too concerned with the comedy of life which is never wholly tragic, and this view is so strongly O'Connor's that, incomplete as this work is as a *Vita,* one has no doubt Michael O'Donovan at twenty was well along his way to the heights he was so fond of.

A Prose Bestiary

THE OWL HOOTS TWICE AT CATFISH BEND. By Ben Lucien Burman. Illustrated by Alice Caddy. Introduction by Robert Hillyer. Taplinger. $2.95

By JOHN P. SISK

THE *Owl Hoots Twice at Catfish Bend* is the latest addition to Mr. Burman's "Catfish Bend" series, all of which, I am informed, have a combination of sophistication and naiveté that makes them popular with adults as well as children. Apparently the other books in the series are also prose bestiaries—allegorical satires in which men disguised as beasts and birds are used to criticize human affairs.

The situation at Catfish Bend is in the beginning idyllic, with furred and feathered creatures coexisting in sweet reasonableness. Into this paradise come the gray fox and the wharf rat begging asylum from alleged attackers. The community's leaders are suspicious, but the humanitarian code of the Bend prevents them from expelling the newcomers. Besides, as one of them points out, the gray fox knows city ways and may be able to teach them a lot.

The gray fox, aided by the wharf rat, then turns the community against its leaders and becomes a dictator in a collectivist society. He opposes his totalitarian efficiency to the order of nature, harries the rabbits and the wild hogs out their ancient domains, breaks the community's pact with the birds and drives them out of the Bend. Inevitably there is war. The birds attack and, aided by the hitherto neutral bats (they couldn't make up

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their minds whether they were beasts or birds), expel the wicked intruders. The deluded animals return to their senses, welcome back their forgiving leaders and harmony is reestablished—a denouement that Mr. Burman brings about with considerable wit and skill.

The method and the political undertone here may remind adult readers of Orwell's *Animal Farm*. But that Swiftean allegory was crystal clear in the passionate delineation of its enemy. Mr. Burman's book has less passion and more generality: it will fit all kinds of totalitarian bad guys and social planners. Being against his collectivism, especially when it is inspired by such rascals as the fox and rat, is like being against sin. Basically, however, the book has all the signs of a bedtime story for the Right: the low opinion of the masses and the democratic process, the suspicion of intelligence and change, the reliance upon traditional wisdom (humorously represented by the proverb-spouting blacksnake), and the conviction that the government which governs least is best. But how, I wonder, did a community of such gullible individuals ever achieve an idyllic condition, and what possible chance for them is there short of a dictatorship of good guys?

This question does not bother Robert Hillyer, who in a polemical introduction emphasizes the extent to which Mr. Burman's books have been good ambassadors abroad. He would much prefer that the Nobel Prize go to Mr. Burman rather than to "those writers who habitually traduce their country." From this we are to infer that Catfish Bend is to be preferred to Yoknapatawpha County. Fortunately, the Nobel Prize people have not yet agreed.

But I do not hold Mr. Hillyer's introduction against Mr. Burman's book. I suspended my political disbelief and enjoyed it. My a-political siblings enjoyed it, and Miss Caddy's illustrations, even more. As Eudora Welty once said about the kind of juvenile fiction she really liked, it has the right kind of trouble in it.

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By TOWNSEND BREWSTER

CONRAD Aiken is a well-known name in the field of American poetry, but he remains somehow more familiar to the general public for his work in other branches of literature. As a critic, he is both penetrating and astute. There are two celebrated and widely anthologized short stories, one of which, "Silent Snow, Secret Snow," has been recreated with great success on the modern-dance stage; the other, "Mr. Arcularis," is almost as ubiquitous as W. W. Jacob's "The Monkey's Paw," having been a favorite on radio, and rendered in a stage version by the author himself. Just this season, ANTA presented a bill consisting of "The Coming Forth By Day Of Osiris Jones" and "The Kid." And yet these bring us back to Aiken's poetry and the subject of this review, for neither of these works was designed for the theater, and both are included in "Selected Poems."

In considering Aiken's poetry, one becomes insistently reminded of Walter Pater's dictum, "All art constantly aspires to the condition of music." "Music," Sidney Lanier proclaimed, "is love in search of a word." Upon further reflection, one realizes that the great virtue of the Lanier pronunciamento is its utter impracticability. Because, of all the arts, music exercises the greatest appeal, the insidiousness of Pater's statement is its great temptation to be taken as a precept. Théophile Gautier, the principal exponent of the theory and technique of the transposition of the arts, actually wrote few musical poems. In those that he did write, such as "Variations sur le Carnaval de Venise" and "Symphonie en blanc majeur," his procedure was, in the first, to recreate the effect and associations of a specific melody, and, in the second, to adapt to literary uses the thematic development characteristic of music.

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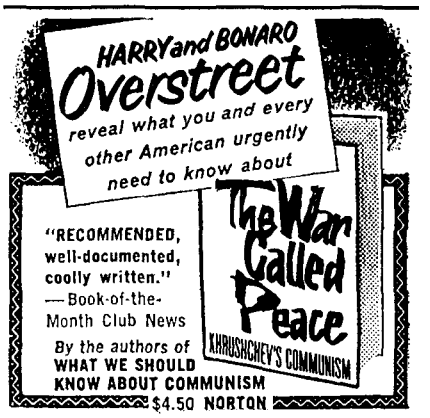
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In some of the "Preludes for Memnon," notably, Number III, Aiken has recourse to the latter method, developing with fruitful results, the implications of a word or phrase. Too often, however, the attempt to treat vocabulary as if it were made up of notes, leads him to fall back helplessly on whatever evocativeness may reside in the word, "music," itself.

In this post-Freudian era, there is yet another spell, one completely different from that exerted by music, under which the modern man of letters is likely to fall. This is psychoanalysis, which so often prompts the substitution of clinical observation, the one great failing of modern literature, for the moral concerns that are its *sine qua non*. With Aiken, the reader often finds himself in the position of the analyst while the poet, supine on the couch, extirpates his problems. To this situation, there are possible negative reactions. One may be embarrassed at not being equipped to conduct such treatment, or one may resent not receiving a fee. In such a poem as "The Wedding," however, by joining the Freudian insights to a combination of the two insect-metamorphosis myths of Tithonus and of Arachne, he succeeds in making them a properly subservient part of the whole.

This book is marred by the flaws usually attendant on great prolificness, a tendency toward repetitiousness and a reliance on formulae, i.e., an overuse of parallels, paradox, and oxymoron. But it is also a book through which beauty, not to mention considerable craftsmanship, is diffused.

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Richard Gilman, a regular contributor, writes frequently on drama and criticism.

Vivian Mercier, who teaches at City College in New York, has taught and written widely about both modern poetry and French literature.

Elizabeth Bartelme is on the staff of a well-known New York publishing house.

John P. Sisk is on the faculty of Gonzaga University, Spokane, Washington.

Townsend Brewster, a free-lance writer, has written continuity and done translations for N.B.C. operas.

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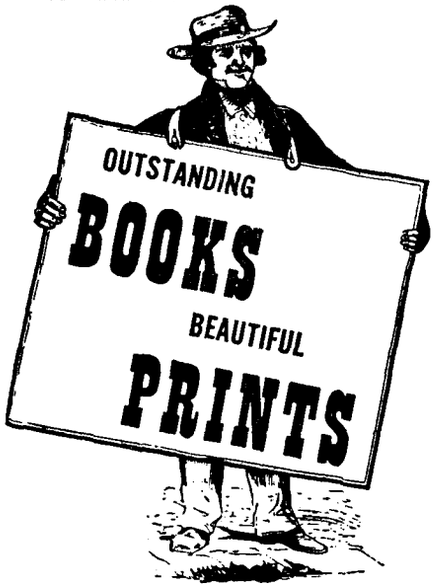

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